

How Families Lived



Sumerians lived in walled cities surrounded by villages and hamlets out in the farmlands. Sumerian houses were made from clay or mud brick. Most houses were one story high, and built as several rooms grouped together around an open courtyard. More wealthy people built two-story houses with the ground floor having a reception area, kitchen, lavatory, servants' and slaves' quarters, and probably a private chapel. Some tenements had three stories. House walls were whitewashed.

Reed mats were placed on the floor, and wall hangings hung on the walls.

Large and small houses were built together in a haphazard way along narrow, winding streets and alleys. Water was drawn from wells and a system of drains took waste from the towns.

Furniture

Furniture consisted of low tables and high-backed chairs. Wooden-framed beds were also used. Baskets and chests were used for storage and as ornaments. Furniture made of bronze and ivory has been found in royal tombs in the ancient city of Ur.

Men

Men were considered the head of the family. Men worked either as craftsmen, as temple personnel, as personnel on estates owned by the temple or wealthy citizens, or on their own farms. Most were farmers, boatmen, fishermen, or merchants. The better educated were scribes, teachers, architects, and doctors. If a man was a client of the temple, he worked for the temple or its lands, and if he was a client of a wealthy man's estate, he worked for that estate. Craftsmen included sculptors, potters,

jewelers, carpenters, leather-workers, **fullers**, and metalworkers.

Women

Women were concerned with the important job of caring for children and teaching them the values of the Sumerian culture. Mothers and fathers had equal authority over their children. Women were not always given the same formal education as men; but women scribes do appear in the records. Women did participate in industry and commerce as they frequently ran their own business. They also worked in the textile industry, spinning and weaving cloth of wool and flax. Most families had slaves to help with the household chores.

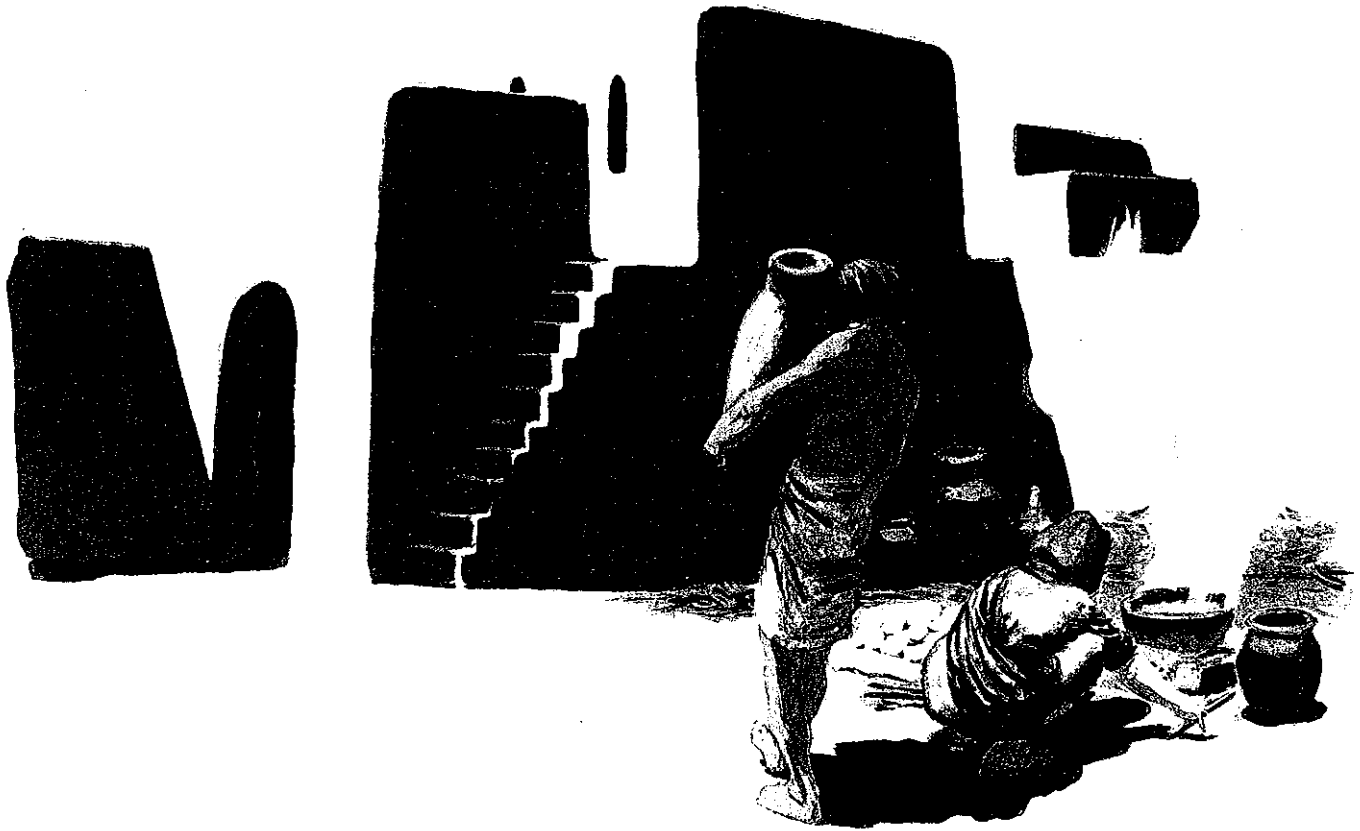
Children

Children had to obey their parents, who could disown them or sell them into slavery. Education was available for children of the upper classes. Scribes taught reading, writing, religion, law, and medicine, which prepared students to become scribes, copyists, librarians, and teachers. When children were old enough to marry, their marriages were arranged by their parents.

Children could also be adopted.

The Sumerian School

The Sumerian school was called the **edubba**, meaning "tablet house," and was at first the place where scribes were taught to become recorders and administrators. Later, these schools came to include lessons in botany, zoology, geography, mathematics, astronomy, and language. Here, also, books and stories of the past were copied and new ones written.



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Only children of the wealthy, who had money to pay for lessons and time, attended the school. Peasants and others had to work all day.

The head teacher was called the **ummi**a. There were also teachers in charge of each subject. However, very little is known about how lessons were taught.

Slaves

Prisoners of war from other countries or from other Sumerian city-states became slaves. Chil-

dren were also sold into slavery, and free adults could be made slaves by the courts as punishment. Slaves worked for whoever owned them. They were usually well-treated because healthy slaves could work harder. The average price for an adult slave in the market was 20 shekels of silver, often less than the price of a donkey.

Slaves did have spare time and could work for others during their own time to earn money to buy their freedom.

Clothes



Stone relief of the Amorite god Baal.

Sumerian temple sculptures and carvings give us the best idea of how the Sumerians dressed. Their clothes were made of finely woven wool and linen.

Men

Men draped their garments around the lower part of the body and tied them at the waist, leaving the upper part of the body bare. Some sculpture shows men in long tiered skirts. In later times the men also draped garments over the upper part of the body to the neck.

Men wore their hair long and parted in the middle. Some wore beards and others were clean shaven.

Women

Women wore a flounced skirt in early times, which was later replaced by a long straight skirt. A large fringed shawl worn over the skirt was draped over the left shoulder, leaving the right arm bare. Long shawls covering the body from head to foot were also worn.

Hair was usually plaited into one plait, which was wound around the head; and women had headdresses of ribbons, beads, and pins.

Wealthier men and women wore soft leather shoes while sandals were worn by everyone else. Jewelry consisting of bracelets, necklaces, anklets, rings, and earrings were worn by Sumerian women.

Opposite: man and woman embracing.